

## Nine ways teachers and parents can work together to help the dependent underachiever

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Teachers and parents need to work together to help students who are dependent underachievers. Underachieving students have learned to manipulate the people around them to get them to do their work. They've come to believe they're not capable of doing the work and that they need someone else to do it.

Teachers and parents can work together to help the dependent underachievers become independent achievers by supporting the efforts of one another by

1. Encouraging students to make the effort to complete their work independently at school and at home.
2. letting students struggle to complete the work. Reassure them that most students, even good students, struggle a bit when doing assignments. It's normal. Make sure, though, that students are capable of doing the work by checking test scores in the school record. I check these scores whenever I have a student that I suspect is underachieving.
3. Insisting that you will only check their work after they have completed it and then you'll give them feedback.
4. Focusing first on the quantity of work the student has done and then on the quality.
5. Giving honest praise to students about how much of the task they have completed. I say things like- well, you've started the assignment; good, you keep working at it etc. I'm encouraging the process of doing the work at first and then later I'll focus on the quality of the work.
6. Using positive rewards such as stars, stickers, or other rewards. I teach high school kids and they still like stickers. I go to my local dollar store and get stickers of different themes suitable for boys and girls and I'll let them choose the stickers they want or I'll just put some on that I think they'll like as a surprise. I've used car and motorcycle stickers, basketball, baseball and hockey stickers, hearts, butterflies and happy face stickers. I've had grade 12 students complain only half kidding that I forgot to put a sticker on their work. I also ask students what they would like as a reward. I would prefer it if my students were self motivated, and I didn't have to give rewards. But, they aren't yet and I have to teach the students I have.
7. Sending completed work home with positive comments.
8. Inviting parents to reward students for completing work independently. This could include time alone with a parent on some activity like a movie. Again, I would negotiate the rewards with the student. Each student and situation is different.
9. Guarding against stepping in too soon to help the student. Helping too quickly is not helping at all. I'm guilty of doing this sometimes, especially if I'm rushed. Find a strategy that helps you not step in too soon. One thing I do when students ask me to check their work all the time, I'll respond by say something like do you think it's OK. I want them to use their judgment, and I have found that by putting the onus back on the students they will eventually come to trust their judgment.

If you've found some ways to help students become independent achievers, I'd love to hear about them. Please share them. Thanks.

It's really ironic that I write on this topic at this time because I have one of the most dependent students I've had in my new class for a long time. Every few minutes the student asks me for approval. I'm taking my own advice and even the other students are encouraging him in a positive way to complete his work independently. I hadn't thought of me being a role model for other students on how to deal with dependent learners. You just never know what you're teaching. I do know however, that it's going to be a long haul.

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